

Title III – No Child Left
Behind Act of 2001

English Language Learners

► A guide for low-incidence districts



Helping ELL students manage:

New Schools
New Languages
New Cultures
New Challenges
New Skills

Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education
D. Kent King, Commissioner of Education

THE SUDDEN ARRIVAL OF STUDENTS speaking languages other than English can be challenging to nonexperienced school district personnel who are expected to serve them. This document provides novice school districts with practical knowledge of the first steps to overcoming the anxiety of hosting new students who are English Language Learners (ELL). References on issues addressed here can be found in the *Educating Linguistically Diverse Students* handbook located on the Missouri Migrant Education and English Language Learning (MELL) Web site at mo-mell.org/resources.

Why must a district identify ELL students?

All school districts in Missouri are required to implement a plan designed to systematically identify students who speak languages other than English at home. The plan should include procedures for assessing the language ability of these students in the areas of reading, writing, speaking and listening (Missouri School Improvement Program Standards 6.3). The district should designate a plan implementer (the ESOL coordinator). School personnel enrolling ELL students should be educated in the process of identifying, assessing and providing services to these students. These requirements apply to all school districts including those that do not currently serve ELL students. Districts with a low number of ELL students may contract with a neighboring district for services until they have a qualified ELL teacher in place.

How can a district and ELL students' families share information about their cultures and communities?

The United States is experiencing a period of growth in linguistic and cultural diversity throughout its high-quality educational system. Families with students of non-English backgrounds are resourceful in providing information about their children. School personnel are encouraged to interact with the new families to gather information about the linguistic, social and cultural resources of their new students and their communities of origin. They must avoid asking questions related to immigration status and social security numbers. During school and family conversations, questions may include language-use practices, students' life at home, parents' expectations, parents' knowledge about schooling, parents' areas of expertise, etc., for future collaboration. The school personnel may share information related to the American education system, expectations, opportunities and any available resources at school and in the host community. In summary, all questions to new families must be strictly oriented to identifying their needs. Appropriate services must follow.

How can a district get new ELL students' families involved in school activities?

ELL students' families bring a wealth of linguistic and sociocultural experiences to the new school and community. One of the best ways to benefit from the rich variety of expertise that they acquired in their communities of origin is to invite parents to general meetings, open houses or workshops where they can comfortably share their views and knowledge with the school population. They may not be fluent in English and be able to make formal presentations, but their familiarization with school personnel and activities could encourage them to share their theories, views and experiences in one-on-one situations during socials and breaks.

How can a district increase ELL student families' involvement in school activities?

Poverty, multiple job commitments, cultural backgrounds and many other factors may prevent English learners' parents from attending school meetings, conferences, open houses, etc. School administrators must adapt their schedules to allow choices. Schools are advised to inform ELL students' parents as soon as activities are planned to allow them to make arrangements at work.

What if a district does not have an ESOL teacher?

The state of Missouri requires that all school districts be prepared to test ELL students for their language abilities and for service purposes. One way to overcome this challenge is to view the Limited English Proficiency (LEP) Census from DESE's Web site to locate a nearby school district with an (LEP) population and make arrangements to borrow or to speak to an experienced ESOL teacher for testing or advice. When less than 20 ELL students are present, some tutoring sessions could be provided by a regular teacher, a foreign language teacher, or an aide teacher under the supervision of a certified teacher while a district is preparing to have a teacher attend ESOL-related training. School personnel can contact DESE for information regarding upcoming ESOL-related training workshops, conferences or meetings. Title I services are not enough to help English learners. There must be some modifications or adaptation of the curriculum geared to the material accessibility and English learning.

The state of Missouri requires that all school districts serving 20 or more LEP students hire a full-time certified or ESOL-endorsed teacher.

What paperwork may a school district request from ELL students or parents?

A school is required to have documentation that a child has been immunized or is exempt from immunization because of religious beliefs or because of a medical contraindication determined by a physician. A school may also ask for proof of residency within the district, transcripts and information verifying the student's age. Birth certificates, hospital records or affidavits are examples of documents that can be used to verify age. Under no circumstances should a student be denied enrollment because the student or parent cannot or refuses to provide a birth certificate. The same is true for Social Security numbers. A student cannot be denied admission to school or participation in a program based on the student's undocumented status. A student's undocumented status refers to the inability to provide a Social Security number, green card, visa or other documentation indicating legal residence in the United States of America. Any such discrimination would be a denial of the equal protection of the law in violation of the 14th Amendment to the United States Constitution.

What does equal [educational] opportunity mean?

Equal educational opportunity means that all Missouri school children, regardless of national origin, race, color, age, sex or disability, should be able to receive a quality education in a welcoming school environment that gives them the opportunity to obtain the knowledge and the skills they will need to be successful in life. *ELL students must not be left behind.*

Should only English be taught to ELL students?

School districts are encouraged, whenever the resources are present, to emphasize both the English and the native language and to promote multicultural understanding.

Are special education services appropriate for ELL students?

School personnel must avoid inappropriate referrals for special education of English learners. Detailed steps on how to go about this issue may be found in the *Educating Linguistically Diverse Students* handbook.

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Where can I find technical and financial assistance?

The best place to start is on the MELL Web site: www.mo-mell.org/resources. Look for the PDF document titled *Educating Linguistically Diverse Students*. You may also contact DESE at (573) 526-3232 or toll-free at 1-877-435-7537 for guidance to the Web site and for alternative resources. Funding opportunities from the state of Missouri will be made available by funding provided by Title III of The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. Contact the Federal Discretionary Grants Section of DESE for more information. The U.S. Department of Education (USDE) and others offer additional funding opportunities. English Language Acquisition, Language Enhancement for Limited English Proficient Students (OELA) within the USDE provides updates on current announcements of grant competitions. Find the USDE on the Web at www.ed.gov and find additional resources at www.cfda.gov/public/browse_by_agy.asp.

TO ASSIST SCHOOL DISTRICTS IN overcoming educational barriers, a list of resources is available in the *Educating Linguistically Diverse Students* handbook found at www.mo-mell.org/resources. All school districts must adopt a plan to identify, assess and serve English learners. They must have an assessment instrument in place to test ELL students. Refer to the handbook for definitions.



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